

# Confronting Iran

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## Securing Iraq's Border: An Irregular Warfare Concept

November 10, 2007



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## Securing Iraq's Borders: An Irregular Warfare Concept

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*With special thanks to Maj. Gen. John Singlaub (USA, ret.), Billy Waugh, Rowdy Yeats, and Chuck de Caro for their insights and contributions.*



Iran is intentionally employing disruptive, anti-US activities that complicate the peace process in the Iraqi Freedom Theater of operation. Iran's actions kill US personnel, drain resources, and compromise stability in the region. While these actions – particularly cross-border activities into Iraq – are a significant menace, international attention to Iran's destabilizing efforts has largely been overshadowed by concerns about its uranium enrichment program, which has garnered the priority for debate, diplomacy, and sanctions. The US could, however, confront Iran's hostile actions in Iraq by addressing their illegal border movements with a regional special operations strategy that can work in conjunction with the nuclear proliferation conflict. Findings from some historical successes and challenges in Special Operations Forces (SOF) efforts during previous conflicts offer possible solutions for the Iraq/Iran border today that can be expanded to other border issues with Iraq/Turkey, Afghanistan/Pakistan, and Iraq/Syria. These border issues are related to Iran's regional influence capabilities and offer an excellent platform for the US to deter some key Iranian endeavors.

### Situation

The Iranian Revolutionary Guards Forces and their irregular sub-elements, such as al Quds (Jerusalem) Force, enact disruptive activities against western interests and sectarian factions. They coordinate extremist group, insurgent, and resistance actions on behalf of the Iranian regime agenda through a chain of command up to the Ayatollah. The IRGC Quds Force trains foreign personnel in Iran and abroad to organize and participate in terrorism and subversion. The Quds force is allegedly the pre-eminent force behind Iran's involvement in Iraq. Conventional US military or political action in opposition to the Quds, however, has been ineffective against their cloaked operations; autonomous, decentralized, operational networks; and safe havens in Iran.

The US must halt Iran's meddling in Middle Eastern peace initiatives to ensure regional stability and the security of US forces operating in Iraq and Afghanistan, but there are serious obstacles to operations countering Iran. Any attempt by the US military to engage the Quds across Iran's border would be viewed internationally as a violation of Iran's sovereignty and an attack against Iran. Sanctions and political efforts against Iran have proven to be ineffective. The US must also act swiftly to reduce the mounting pressures of area allies like Turkey from exploiting the Iraqi situation while American hands are tied in the regional commitment.

The proposed solution presented in this report involves an augmentation of SOF along the Iraqi border to thwart illicit arms traffic, infiltration activity, and insurgency support. This solution for the Iraq/Iran border can be applied elsewhere in the region. SOF units have historically provided border security and can again successfully control border traffic. Enhanced capabilities in recon, direct action, information operations, unconventional warfare, and local commerce exchanges—to include animal and drug trade—would further bolster SOF efficacy. More aggressive US “small-war” initiatives can destroy, disrupt, interdict, and deter the elusive Iranian alliances and complex networks supporting Iraq's civil clashes through their recruitment, motivation, procurement, sanctuary, and funds. It is through these support groups that the Quds and other Iranian elements create the ability to operate against the US. SOF is the ideal human

element defeat mechanism for this conflict. They are uniquely experienced and attuned to the delicate interaction and trust building required between communities of vying sects, tribes, clans, factions, and families.

Some seasoned Special Operations community members compare the Iran/Iraq situation to cross-border challenges posed by North Vietnam's forays into Laos and answered by US Special Observation Group (SOG) operational missions to thwart such movements. The SOG mission in Vietnam and its bordering countries, like the mission of SOF teams operating in Iraq and Afghanistan, was to: interact with locals to enable human factor resistance activities, gather intelligence, hinder enemy infiltration through air strikes, conduct ambushes, mine roads and trails, sabotage trucks and equipment, and capture prisoners. U.S. tactical air, fixed wing and rotary wing gun-ships were authorized to exploit opportunity targets within the full depth of the authorized Area of Operations. By locating the enemy before they had an opportunity to strike, SOG teams were also able to avoid future attacks against U.S. forces. Similar SOG projects could be enhanced immediately in Iraq and Afghanistan to confront Iranian cross-border activities.

### **Cross-border Conflict in Laos**

Throughout the First Indochina War (1946-54), communist insurgents in northern Vietnam attempted to supply their comrades on southern battlefields from the People's Republic of China. French colonial forces, which the insurgents needed to avoid, were concentrated in the tapered area of Vietnam. Communist logistical columns therefore diverted movements into neighboring Laos and plotted down the eastern side of the Laotian panhandle before re-entering Vietnam.

Insurgent traffic diminished during the mid-1950s but reemerged years later when North Vietnamese communists attempted to increase rebellion in the South. The supply paths were revitalized and gained the nickname "Ho Chi Minh Trail" to honor their key Vietnamese revolutionary communist leader. In response to the increased movement, South Vietnamese authorities conducted defensive observation forays into Laos to obtain intelligence on Ho Chi Minh Trail infiltration. Reconnaissance yielded information that North Vietnamese movements were more frequent than previously estimated. The Central Intelligence Agency assisted with the reconnaissance through its deployment of supplemental US civilian SOF advisors around the trail.

US political and military leaders deployed additional SOF elements into Laos late in 1958 and early 1959 to organize, train and develop Laotian government forces to control, suppress and eliminate growing Laotian communist forces, the Pathet Lao. The project, coined "White Star," was clandestinely operated through the Ambassador to Laos and was enabled through the Military Assistance Advisory Group (MAAG). White Star logistical support was planned for a minimum six months mission and included developing the medical, communications, postal, personnel, combat supply, and cover stories for the deploying personnel.

Under the program, all personnel were given intensive training and cross training and were given new communications equipment. Training included daily language lessons in both French and Laotian, area studies of the country, and cultural understanding. Personnel were required to read cultural sensitivity books, such as the "Ugly American," to help them understand the enemy and to understand how the US—and US troops—were viewed. The teams worked with the local population, training and advising the military and auxiliary forces, staffing Laotian military schools, and conducting unconventional warfare programs. The UW programs included training

shock teams to be dispatched throughout the highlands to ambush and raid enemy forces, gathering intelligence, and reporting on the use of equipment and supplies. US soldiers simultaneously won “hearts and minds” by meeting the locals’ physical needs and understanding their social, cultural, and religious perspectives.

Initial “White Star” operational plans were made to immediately increase the SOG camps’ intelligence reports of North Vietnamese Army (NVA) movement along the trail. SOG reconnaissance teams were permitted to cross any portion of the long border, and soon increased the number of their missions as part of a three-phase program. First, the teams’ were tasked to identify NVA headquarters, base camps, and supply caches, to be later attacked through air strikes. SOG missions were often planned based on their unique capabilities to obtain reconnaissance evidence of NVA activities that could not be detected by aerial photographs. The teams added to area intelligence by capturing NVA personnel when SOG intercepted them during their patrols or through “snatching” individuals designated as high-value targets. Final phases involved teams recruiting indigenous tribesmen along the trail and organizing resistance groups for long range border operations against the NVA. These effective “White Star” blocking and recon teams significantly restricted the use of Laos for transit or sanctuary and provided extensive intelligence information from locals to US decision makers.

A Special Forces-drafted Border Surveillance Control Operating Concept also enhanced enemy interdiction activities. The program specified the following missions for U.S. and Vietnamese Special Forces monitoring infiltration points: recruit and train personnel to serve in border surveillance and control units in populated areas; establish intelligence nets in the border areas to detect infiltration; direct psychological indoctrination and civic action programs in the border control zone; gain control of the international border little by little and gradually expand small secure areas until the border zone is permanently under the control of the Border Command; and conduct guerrilla warfare—long-range patrol activities to deny the border areas to the Viet Cong by detection, interdiction, harassment, and elimination of the infiltration routes parallel to or through the border control zone.

### **From Internal Defense to Border Crossing**

In 1962, the Geneva Accords guaranteed the neutrality of Laos, calling for all foreign soldiers to leave. The United States agreed to remove its SOF advisors, but the North Vietnamese deployed more troops to Laos. The U.S. responded by activating cross-border “black” operations to protect the neighboring governments against a Communist North Vietnamese insurgency, reduce the inter-territorial transport of war resources headed circuitously from North Vietnam into South Vietnam, and to avoid openly violating the Geneva Accords. Concurrent with the cross-border “black” operations, Project DELTA was responsible for Long Range Reconnaissance Patrol (LRRP) within the borders of South Vietnam.

SOG conducted Vietnam cross-border strategic reconnaissance, raids, renditions, and seek-locate-annihilate-and-monitor (SLAM) missions, leveraging indigenous troops, most of whom came from South Vietnam’s ethnic minorities. These ethnic minorities of Vietnam’s Central Highlands and southern borders were especially helpful in the cross-border operations because of their cross-boundary tribal affiliations in Laos and northern Cambodia.

Cross-border mission operators wore no identification, had non-descript uniforms, and carried untraceable weapons to mitigate concern and avoid violations of neutral territory. The forces crossed the border on foot or in unmarked military helicopters for insertion and extraction. SOG

targeted Laotian villages of ethnic minorities in hopes of inducing villagers to assist in guerrilla operations such as supporting safe-havens, tapping phone lines, and placing seismic/acoustic sensors along specified enemy routes. These Ho Chi Minh Trail routes hosted enemy build-up sites along the massive network of roads and trails originating in North Vietnam and extending throughout eastern Laos and Cambodia.

The objective of other cross-border operations, such as Operation Daniel Boone (Salem House) was to determine the level of local and foreign government support for the NVA and Viet Cong. SOG's teams and helicopters had permission to infiltrate border areas of varying depths. Most cross-border SOG operational activity occurred between 12-15 miles from Vietnam's boundaries and did not unnecessarily exploit the full authorization of movement. While special missions could be conducted further inside neighboring countries, most activity took place close to the border.

These historical SOF operations should be considered in today's planning strategy for Iran and other porous border areas of the Middle East and Southwest Asia.

### **Evaluating Yesterday's Challenge Today**

Iranian forces share many similarities with Vietnamese forces. The resolve of both countries' warriors created a formidable opponent in a challenging operational environment and terrain; both were able to move in a relatively fluid and uncontested manner across borders; both relied on curtailed US operational activities because of political pressure; and both were able to recruit heavily based on the ideological interests of local populations. From an ideological standpoint, the two differ in that the Vietnamese fought for political reasons, whereas the Iranians fight a religious-based conflict that permeates political activity with an ideology that is tied to the region's social structure. The religious component allows the Iranians to draw support from a global community channel for funding, political support, regional cohesion, and a large degree of tolerance. It is through this aspect that surrogates such as Hezbollah and US-opposition groups unite with Iran and its affiliates.

Jane's Intelligence Review and other reliable media state that Iran may have commissioned Imad Mughniyye, Hezbollah's head of security and the mastermind behind dozens of terrorist attacks, to organize Shiite terror cells in Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, United Arab Emirates and Bahrain to attack U.S. targets and interests in the event of war against Iran. Trainees from the Persian Gulf region reportedly have arrived in Lebanon and are conducting training drills in the Bekaa Valley. Iran's support for terrorist groups, such as Hezbollah and Hamas, has negatively impacted regional stability just as the communist insurgency in Vietnam attempted to expand its influence. Iran allegedly directs terrorist activities through its intelligence services, the IRGC, the Foreign Ministry, and the Islamic Culture and Guidance Ministry. The Ministry of Intelligence and Security (MOIS) organizes and conducts terrorist operations from Iranian embassies, consulates, overseas branches of Iranian-owned businesses, charitable foundations, and Islamic cultural centers overseas. MOIS is logistically supported by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which enables MOIS and IRGC personnel to travel and serve overseas under diplomatic cover; this cover sometimes allows diplomats to transport weapons by diplomatic pouch via Iran Air flights. Iranian bonyads (quasi-official charitable foundations) play an indirect role in the sponsorship of terrorism by funneling money to radical Islamic groups and organizations overseas.

Iran wants to ensure that Iraq continues to be ruled by Shi'a. As Shi'a are the minority in the Muslim world, Iran wants to spread their power into Iraq just as the communists wished to

spread their influence. Iran's involvement, to include Quds force application, leverages influence among the country's various Shi'a political factions active in Iraq's fledgling government. This includes weight within the Supreme Islamic Iraqi Council (SIIC), Iraq's largest Shiite party. The Supreme Islamic Iraqi Council was previously known as the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI) and has a head office based in Iran. The SIIC and Iran exploit and propagandize Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki's inability to unite the country's fractured groups. Iran supports the Iraqi Islamic Council's interest in creating federalist self-ruling regions, which would be united under Islam but have less national authority. Such a structure would support Iran's plans for the region and a possible territory takeover in Iraq.

Iran also fosters relations with the armed Shiite elements in Iraq, including the Jamaat al-Sadr al-Thani (JST) movement of Muqtada al-Sadr. The largest Iraqi Shi'a community outside Iraq is in Iran, which allows Quds and SIIC to mobilize them, train them, and send them back to fight inside Iraq. Many of the Iran supported elements are part of the formerly anti-Saddam Badr Brigade that had secret cells, safe havens, and arms caches throughout the marshes in southern Iraq and Kurdistan in Northern Iraq.

The Iranian military supports relations by maintaining a significant presence in the vicinity of the border with eastern Iraq. Three of the four Iranian Corps headquarters are positioned on the western to central part of Iran, with one commanding northwestern forces bordering Turkey, Armenia, and Azerbaijan and defending the capital (Tehran), one commanding central-western forces bordering northern and central Iraq (Esfahan), and one commanding southwestern forces bordering southern Iraq (Shiraz). Logistically, Iran is well-positioned to invade Iraq, especially if US troops withdraw, but it risks a strong international reaction which would be unpalatable to Iran. The more likely scenario would be for Iran to continue to influence Iraq's weak government and steer it away from its current positions.

### **Targeting Al Quds**

Quds operations include the strategic backing and management of pro-Iran Shi'a opposition groups in Iraq and the control of these groups' intelligence and armed factions or militias. The primary objectives of these Iranian groups and their surrogates are to prevent US success in Iraq so as to ensure the stability and security of Iran and its Islamic regime; establish a lasting Iranian influence in 'new Iraq' that could serve Iran's long-term strategic interests in the region and beyond; and prevent the emergence of a 'strong Iraq' that would compete with Iran, or revive the traditional balance of power between the two states. Iranian intelligence agents have supported Iraq's insurgency since 2003, using Shi'ite soft cover in Kazimiya, Baghdad, Karbala, Najaf, Kufa, Nasriyah, Basra, and other cities with sizable Shi'ite populations, to recruit militants under the pretext of providing social services. The Iranian intelligence organization, the Etelaat, has operatives in Iraqi safe-houses equipped with radio transmitters, satellite phones and transport. Iran spends millions of dollars a month in Iraq to support activities in both a covert and an overt manner. Most Quds activities remain uncontested because they occur within Iran's confines or because they are covert activities in Iraq. Interdiction with their support structure remains a significant challenge. Additional insurgent and illicit traffic flows back into Iran through the support structure from both Iraq and Afghanistan. Freedom of movement and logistical facilitation by ethnic groups and traditional flows further enhance the integration of insurgents, arms and drug transfer, and sanctuary.

Iran's Quds force activities are also tactical, with clear evidence of Tehran providing material support for attacks on American troops. Militarily, Iran transports explosives and heavy arms

such as Chinese rockets fabricated in China, smuggled into Iraq through porous borders from Iran. Iranian produced Explosive Formed Projectiles (EFPs) are smuggled from Iran, as well, and confound US counter-Improvised Explosive Devices (IED) activities. EFPs are specially manufactured IEDs operating on a shaped charge principle, which uses the funneled explosive force of the bomb to create a high velocity, molten mass that burns a small hole through a vehicle's armor. Iran has provided plastic explosives and advanced road side bombs or detonating devices to the Taliban in Afghanistan for use against NATO forces as well. Coalition analysis states munitions recovered in two Iranian convoys had "clear indications of Iranian origination." Some munitions proved to be identical to Iranian supplied goods previously discovered in Iraq.

US and allied Special Operations Forces have already conducted direct targeting activities to disrupt or destroy the Quds elements operating within Iraq but have not overtly pursued Quds and its affiliates across the Iraqi border into Iran for fear of setting off a greater conflict and provoking international scrutiny. Unfortunately, long-term SOF success is hindered by many of the short-term defensive mission assignments, insufficient intelligence support, US political conflicts, and less strategic tasking of SOF resources.

### **Moving Forward**

The United States has repeatedly accused the Quds force of providing training and arms to Iraqi insurgents who attack U.S. troops. Subsequently, the Bush administration has designated the Revolutionary Guard Corps as a terrorist group in response to its growing involvement in Iraq and Afghanistan, its support for extremists throughout the Middle East, and its attempts to procure nuclear-related materials. The Revolutionary Guard Corps were named a terrorist element under a prior Executive Order 13224, which the President signed two weeks after the Sept. 11, 2001 attacks, to obstruct terrorist funding.

The Executive Order authorizes the US to identify individuals, businesses, charities and extremist groups engaged in terrorist activities. This order supports many of the activities that SOF could plan and employ. Economic sanctions are not having a substantial impact and remain prioritized towards Iran's use of a civilian power program to cover nuclear weapons development with little to no mention of cross-border infringement. Russia and China have criticized new sanction proposals, and Iran has dismissed sanctions as ineffective and irrelevant. The latest sanctions against the IRGC target a reported 25 Iranian entities, including individuals and companies owned or controlled by the Revolutionary Guard that play a major role in Iran's domestic economy and international trade or that can benefit from the American financial system.

Executive Orders allow a more aggressive approach against Iran and help to remind the general public that the US is implementing existing policy, such as Executive Orders 13099 (Prohibiting transactions with terrorists who threaten to disrupt the Middle-East peace process), 13382 (blocking property of weapons of mass destruction proliferators and their supporters), and 13438 (blocking property of certain persons who threaten stabilization efforts in Iraq).

Through these orders, some effective options to defeat Iranian influence include: Information Operations; Unconventional Warfare; Zones of Separation (ZoS) and Demilitarized Zones (DMZ); US Armed Forces Withdrawal; the Media; and Diplomacy.

## 1. Information Operations

Information Operations' control of behavior, economic capital, and resource power through information-based manipulation, fear, and intimidation, significantly enhances physical territory control. In addition to the US Executive Orders, Article 41 of the United Nations Charter contains authority that permits embargoes in cases of military aggression, restricting the transportation of arms and strategic materials. Economic embargoes have been ineffective without international cooperation and strict enforcement, but a potentially more effective electronic embargo is also allowed under this Article. Such an electronic embargo, which has the effect of completely shutting off the information flow of a modern national state, is much more achievable than an economic embargo and plays to US Information Operation (IO) capabilities by crossing the open infosphere into Iran. Should Iran choose to counter such a UN mandated information embargo with cyber attacks against the US or the West, it would open itself to large scale military actions by the US, a US-led coalition, or--with UN approval—a UN force under Article 42.

The electronic/information embargo is equivalent to a naval blockade of the past. These actions occur outside of Iran's borders, whether the blockade is physical or electronic. An information blockade is not a physical assault upon a sovereign territory, but could successfully isolate Iran by assaulting its electronic information networks and internal communication capabilities. The blockade, especially when modulated on and off over time, would have a cleaving support effect for the government because of the frustration caused within the varied commerce and population sectors. This is the opposite achievement engendered by kinetic attacks that tend to enrage populations due to loss of life or property, and socially focus vengeance compulsion towards the attacker. An electronic embargo would also negatively affect more economic activity than current embargos, and it would disrupt the primary means of pro-insurgent communication, which is manifested by the enormous proliferation of cell phones with text messaging.

The US should implement an IO campaign, with or without an electronic/information blockade, along the Iranian borders. Hand crank radios should be distributed throughout the border region for use with the indigenous population. All SOF activities must be tied to this integrated IO campaign for maximum influence upon the population.

A centralized production center in Iraq would control programming, with locally integrated representatives on staff to effectively target the complex human terrain of "hearts and minds." Messaging would be of a contrived influence orientation designed to spread virally throughout Iran and Iraq to damage and ostracize the enemy. IO benefits this particular theater since it can be designed to concentrate on the nuanced operating environment human factors that are involved in resistance activities: demographics, culture, tribes, clans, class, ethnicity, and key actors. Content will be sewn in the form of sabotage, distrust, persuasion, impersonation, conformity, and ingratiation and multiplied by widespread dissemination, especially televisive dissemination deeper within Iran's territory.

The information targeting will damage the adversaries' credibility and trust, decelerate the flow of their knowledge, create communication bottlenecks, and generate social disturbances between linked groups. Adversarial energy and resources must then be spent in defensive posturing to mitigate attacks, re-posturing themselves, escaping punishment, and retaining dominance. All of these can disturb Iranian support groups' talent procurement, status, power, and trustworthiness creating a natural social system shift that increases friction flash-points. It can be instigated within the many layers of social ties that exist between Iran and Iraq through messages being transmitted along the border regions to reduce infiltration.

To accommodate the rough trans-border terrain, a satellite uplink would transmit to multiple repeaters that should be constructed along the borders and reside within SOF base camps' protection. The series of repeaters (transponders) make the extension of a signal possible over a distance by retransmission on different frequencies, to destination locations. While the base production and transmission capability is being built, an airborne EC-130E Commando Solo radio and television broadcast platform can temporarily conduct the psychological operations and civil affairs broadcasts. The EC-130E flies during either day or night scenarios and is air refuelable, so its use is an ideal solution to fill the gap during the communication utility construction. Supporting UAV fleets, balloons, and blimps with communications capabilities for sensor data pickup or as a relay node can temporarily support the work of the pre-construction repeaters or augment the effort indefinitely.

Private sector technologies and services, such as television airmobile reports via satellite, could also be procured quickly. These "flying newsrooms" could easily be made operational and be deployed to rapidly increase the production quality and speed of IO support broadcasts.

## **2. Unconventional Warfare**

Unconventional warfare (UW) capabilities and flexible SOF targeting plans can reduce Iran's anti-US activities without producing the backlash that an encroachment onto Iran's sovereign ground would likely provoke. The requirement for maximum efficiency in targeting is to carry out a systematic identification of Iranian operational and tactical centers of gravity within Iraq. For this, SOF will initially negotiate with Iraqi border area and village leaders, sheikhs, and emirs. It will be important to motivate those leaders through honor codes, situational awareness, and a stake in the outcome so they are encouraged to influence locals to assist SOF in identifying Iranian supporters and benefactors. Mobile SOF strike forces can still execute appropriate quick take downs in Iraq. Army Special Forces (SF) detachments, however, should be specifically employed to conduct unrestricted, unconventional warfare activities that are initially focused on Information Operations through civil affairs, deception, psychological warfare, and human factor "soft-war" efforts; and to leverage complex strategic reconnaissance activities, unattended ground sensor implants, dual purpose electronic relays, and border observation stations/towers (augmented by joint aerial and space support).

SF would be employed with the tasking of offensive, unconventional warfare as the primary objective. The Department of Defense UW definition has evolved, but contextually it still refers to the initial doctrinal concept originating from the Office of Strategic Services during World War II. In that classic role, UW is comprised of covert and clandestine operations in enemy-held or – influenced territory. It has further expanded to include subversion against hostile states. In either case, the focus is on operations conducted by, with, or through irregular forces in support of a resistance movement, an insurgency, or conventional military operations.

As stated earlier, the issue of stability and increased security in Iraq depends largely upon curbing Iran's influence on the territory by securing borders and ensuring proximate ethnic groups are supportive of US activities. Cross-boundary tribal affiliations are as critical in Iraq as they were in Vietnam. Iraqi tribes historically have been sources of local intelligence. The British and French Intelligence Services in the 1920s used local tribes as valuable sources of intelligence despite the pitfalls of changing loyalties and quid-pro-quo agreements. Tribal intelligence officers relied on indigenous intermediaries from sheikhs to shepherds to secure their entrée into clan groups. US SOF has worked in the past with the Kurds along the Iran/Iraqi

border building relationships in support of the Iranian Shah's counter-Iraqi border activities during the 1970's. The Kurds had virtually unlimited movement and capabilities along the border and miles within either side. The freedom of movement, knowledge of terrain, and fierce independence of tribal groups can still be exploited for our benefit. Another possible surrogate could entail re-establishing contacts within the US designated terrorist group, Mujahadeen-e-Khalq (MEK- People's Mujahadeen Organization of Iran). MEK is the largest and most militant group opposed to the Islamic Republic of Iran with locations along the Iraqi border and extensive reach throughout the social, economic, and political structure of Iran. Their reach would extend our human asset-building capabilities across Iraq's borders.

Had the US remained in Laos with SOG White Star teams expanding their UW influence along the trail, the border likely would have maintained greater security against infiltration. US leaders would be wise to allow SF to be the primary trainer of the Iraqi Department of Border Enforcement to help seal the hundreds of miles of desert and mountain terrain borders, as SOG had done with the Border Surveillance-Control Operating Concept. SOG teams had reportedly conducted well over one thousand border reconnaissance missions, around 200 platoon-sized patrols, and a handful of multi-platoon operations. Missions accomplished route interdiction through intelligence activities, captures, kills, and information operations.

Through UW, the US can perform a similar broad spectrum of military and paramilitary operations, conducted through indigenous or surrogate locals to accomplish subversion, sabotage, intelligence activities, agent recruitment, and guerrilla warfare (hit and run tactics characterized by independent or semi-independent forces operating to harass, delay, or disrupt enemy forces through sabotage, subversion, and raids). UW activities enabled by Iraq's ethnic groups will allow the US to more effectively blend, visibly and culturally, into Iran's territory more effectually than is currently possible with predominately Caucasian US SOF personnel.

The duration of SF stay should be committed in terms of years with resupply carried out by logistical teams so SF does not have to return to "lower ground." By remaining with locals, SF would live and breathe along the borders and be allowed to engage in area trade for primary provisions, devoid of all sense and appearances of "little America." SF would improve their status of influence, movement, and facilitation by isolated living among the ethnic groups and by adapting to local trade with those who regularly traverse both sides of the border. Long stay activities win hearts and minds and generate trusted information sharing between SF and locals. Trust is built through years of SF presence as soldiers provide unabated medical, construction, engineering, and educational assistance and help in the creation auxiliary security forces for local populations. Education should also include two-way "mini" language schools where SF can learn local dialects and villagers can learn English. These schools should focus on children in order to create future relationships and build immediate communication bridges and area sensors for adversarial movement information.

The intelligence preparation of the battlefield (IPB) must be tied to these efforts with contextually appropriate cultural intelligence, social anthropology, and behavioral psychology to improve area understanding and analysis operationalization for missions. All SF local interactions and relationship building plans should have border intelligence collection activities included as a primary objective.

SF should also be permitted to create local outpost enterprises in the horse, goat, donkey and/or sheep trade and training, as appropriate to the differing local area needs and value system. The

domestic animal enterprise would allow SF more social interaction and contributions to the local economy and would also require dressing and looking like the indigenous inhabitants. Gifts to local leaders or key individuals of relationship interest could also come from the SF livestock, which matches that of the local lifestyle pride and culture. Drugs should not be exempt. Taking this model and replicating it in Afghanistan, the US would do well to engage in the raw poppy, opium, and heroin trade by buying up as much local supply and paying higher prices for it than the adversarial military and drug cartels. Similar to CIA and SOG opium and heroin involvement within the Golden Triangle (Burma, Thailand and Laos) with Air America transport, the US can throw off the local drug economy and procure the raw product for proper medical and material use and refinement or destroy it. The cost of purchasing illicit goods and disrupting/destroying black market social networks is less expensive in the long run than activity interdiction.

### **3. Zones of Separations (ZOS) and Demilitarized Zones (DMZ)**

Zones of Separation (ZOS) and Demilitarized Zones (DMZ) are other options to pave the way for future SOF missions around or in Iran's territory. The zones typically refer to a buffer area where equipment and activity are prohibited, creating a neutral zone to keep antagonistic areas apart. The Iraqi and US governments can define a zone on at least the Iraqi side of the border to prevent border violations by allowing greater freedom of movement for security forces and restricting the movement of others. Restrictive measures will buffer Iraq from Iran and expand the field of view for those observing potential infractions. It also enables a neutral area for authorities to engage suspects that are within the restricted zone; can better facilitate UAV reconnaissance; and can be safer tethering territory for observation and radio relay blimps or balloons. Hostile actions against the surveillance tools and territorial encroachment would warrant an appropriate US/Iraqi response. SOF can phase in graduated force to take action against zone violations. This was not done extensively in Vietnam or Laos. As a result, when SOG elements were operating within a restricted area, they could be fired upon or captured without warning for a violation of sovereign territory. Similarly, adversaries had greater leeway to stray into restricted territory based on a "margin of mapping errors." With a ZOS, SOF would have more flexibility to conduct personnel recovery, medical evacuation, patrols, and other activities that would provide cover for other operations. Those trespassing in pre-defined restricted space could also be engaged with less argument arising from map errors or territory dispute. Ranges of the ZOS can be determined by logistical considerations, but would likely suffice with a designated space of 10km on each side of the border.

A ZOS could also be used to buffer border areas between Afghanistan/Iran and Afghanistan/Pakistan to help solve Taliban and drug traffic problems; Syria/Iraq for insurgent movement; and Turkey/Iraq to solve Kurd problems. The US may be able to convince Turkey to pull back from Iraq with an established ZOS. As in the case of US/South Korea and North Korea border security, SOF and/or allies can jointly police the zone to reduce tensions and deter Turkey from sending troops into northern Iraq to hunt Turkish Kurd rebels, some of whom may be valuable intelligence and operational sources for the US. The ZOS would even help reduce Kurd rebel attacks within Turkey. Turkey's movement into Iraq's Kurd territories, to prevent the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) from using Iraqi soil as logistical support, will disrupt one of the moderately stable areas in the country.

### **4. US Armed Forces Withdrawal**

The debate on proper SOF application in Iraq also hinges on when the US will pull out conventional ground forces. While conventional forces challenge some unconventional initiatives and disrupt some counterinsurgency efforts, SOF personnel and activities can benefit

from hiding and blending among the large force activities to screen sensitive SOF movements. The conventional force distractions to media and insurgents can provide additional time to build SOF camps and communications networks while large force elements still remain. SOF practitioners can gradually implement a plan that isolates their work. SOF plans should commence immediately, provided the conventional military elements remain in Iraq, while media coverage remains centered on conventional “surge” forces, Department of State security contractors, road-side IEDs, sectarian violence, and local car bombings.

## **5. The Media**

Other aspects of the rules of engagement in Iran must change from those of Vietnam and Laos given the rapid and pervasive reporting by media and internal US information leaks. Ideally, US leaders should allow SF to operate along the Iraqi borders freely with an established framework for area programs combined with efforts to reduce media coverage when possible. While Vietnam’s reporting was much more limited than Iraq, news reports still surfaced exposing U.S. cross-border activities and casualties from Vietnam. Unfortunately, the U.S. had stated to the American public that Vietnam’s bordering countries were neutral and that no U.S. troops were present in those countries, which meant no U.S. troops were admittedly killed or detained in those locations. Confusion about the numbers of estimated enemy troops in Laos and cross-border activity disclaimers in light of media reports and inconsistent official statements made U.S. leaders appear to be liars, further hurting the American cause. Today’s enemy is much more adept at exploiting this weakness to its advantage. The US cannot afford to make similar mistakes – denial and the fabrication of lies – with today’s omnipresent communication environment. The savvy use of media and IO is a requirement for policy makers and SOF leaders alike. Apropos to media use, SOF public relations must continue to impress upon the media that distractions caused by combat reporters on the SOF battlefield can adversely affect our own troops. Additionally, if reporters are injured on the battlefield, their well-being creates an additional resource drain as soldiers tend to their wounds and safety.

## **6. Diplomacy**

Finally, these initiatives by the United States military and other government agencies should be leveraged by our government in talks with Iran. Cross-border violations must also be added to Iran’s infringements when discussing their nuclear arms proliferation. During such talks, the US can highlight its options now that Iran’s Revolutionary Guard Corps has been designated a terrorist entity and can emphasize the ability to transform this political designation into an operational one, instituting a proactive approach to curtailing Iranian support for anti-Coalition activities in Iraq, Afghanistan and elsewhere.

## **Summary**

Historical SOF lessons learned have been obtained through field experience and self-sacrifice, and have been passed on to improve mission planning insight and operational concepts. We should not allow the lessons learned by our Special Operations predecessors to be ignored. The US can build upon the past border interdiction during Vietnam and cross-border operations into Laos, among other conflicts, to create a formidable front against Iran’s movements in Iraq and the greater Middle East. The same lessons can be equally successful in cross-application along the borders of Syria, Turkey, and Pakistan.

The United States has the ability, under US Executive Orders, UN Charter, and coalition Special Operation capabilities, to confront and neutralize the challenges posed by the Islamic Republic

of Iran. In order to achieve positional advantage over Iran and victory in Iraq, the US must move quickly and decisively to control the situation using a greater application of pressure and innovative IW concepts.

The recommendations in this report should be seriously considered as we strive to maintain a positive influence in the region. Additional suggestions can be found in a recent American Foreign Policy Council / McCormick Tribune Foundation publication, "Confronting Iran: U.S. Options," as well as in a McCormick Tribune Foundation publication on "Irregular Warfare Leadership in the 21st Century: Attaining and Retaining Positional Advantage." It is our hope that decision makers and the Special Operations community seize this moment and shape the environment to implement a complementary approach. The future stability of the region and our own ultimate homeland security mandate a change today.

## **Authors**

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## **Contributors**

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Maj. Gen. John K. Singlaub's IW duties included a World War II OSS parachute mission into occupied France to organize, train, and lead a French Resistance unit which provided assistance to the Allied invasion forces. He then went to China to train and lead Chinese guerrillas against the Japanese. Just before the Japanese surrendered, he led a parachute rescue mission into an enemy prisoner of war camp on Hainan Island. This resulted in the release of four hundred Allied prisoners of war. He served two tours during the Korean War; one with the CIA in Korea and the other as an infantry battalion commander in the Third Infantry Division. General Singlaub served also as Commander of the Joint Unconventional Warfare Task Force (MAC SOG) in Vietnam.

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Billy Waugh, a Special Forces and CIA legend, has dedicated his life to tracking down and eliminating America's most virulent enemies and making his mark in many of the most important operations in the annals of U.S. Spec Ops. Waugh spent seven and a half years behind enemy lines in Vietnam as a member of a covert group of elite commandos. And at the age of seventy-two, he marched through the frozen high plains of Afghanistan as part of Operation Enduring Freedom.

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## **Definitions**

*Conventional warfare*—A broad spectrum of military operations conducted against an adversary by traditional military or other government security forces that do not include chemical, biological, radiological, or nuclear (CBRN) weapons.\*

*Unconventional warfare (UW)*—A broad spectrum of military and paramilitary operations, normally of long duration, predominantly conducted through, with, or by indigenous or surrogate forces who are organized, trained, equipped, supported, and directed in varying degrees by an external source. It includes, but is not limited to, guerrilla warfare, subversion, sabotage, intelligence activities, and unconventional assisted recovery.\*

*Irregular warfare (IW)* —A violent struggle among state and non-state actors for legitimacy and influence over the relevant populations. IW favors indirect approaches, though it may employ the full range of military and other capabilities to seek asymmetric approaches in order to erode an adversary's power, influence, and will.\*

*Small wars*—Operations undertaken under executive authority, wherein military force is combined with diplomatic pressure in the internal or external affairs of another state whose government is unstable, inadequate, or unsatisfactory for the preservation of life and of such interests as are determined by the foreign policy of our Nation. --Small Wars Manual, 1940

\*JP 1-02, Department of Defense [DOD] Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms

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The McCormick Tribune Foundation is a nonprofit organization committed to making life better for our children, communities and country. Through its charitable grant-making programs, Cantigny Park and Golf, Cantigny First Division Foundation and the McCormick Tribune Freedom Museum, the Foundation is able to positively impact people's lives and stay true to its mission of advancing the ideals of a free, democratic society. For more information, please visit our Web site at [www.McCormickTribune.org](http://www.McCormickTribune.org).

## **About Delphi International Research**

Delphi International Research is a privatized foreign area Human Factors intelligence provider focused on converging psycho-social behavior analysis and cultural anthropology with HUMINT field collection to gauge international actors' intentions and reactions in Irregular Warfare scenarios. The organization's focus is on enabling decision makers with mission enhancing actionable insights, which can minimize battlefield casualties or unplanned operational effects in a particular theater of conflict. For more information, please visit [www.delphiresearch.us](http://www.delphiresearch.us).